

Enhancing Professional Practice Portfolios (PPP) in Teacher Training (TT)

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Professionals in Practice

Introduction

The University of Bolton is one of the largest providers of Initial Teacher Education for the Further Education and Skills Sector in the North West. The University's programmes are also run by five other partner Colleges and have been recently revalidated to offer a more innovative and updated teacher education curriculum.

As part of the Teacher Training programmes, trainee teachers are required to produce a Professional Practice Portfolio (PPP) in which they must provide evidence related to their personal and professional development as a teacher, with a strong component of their own reflective practice. The portfolio must demonstrate evidence in the following areas: reflective action planning in theory (module assignments) and practice (teaching practice); development of personal skills in literacy, language, numeracy and ICT; and engagement in personal and professional self-development to improve practice.

Approximately 300 trainee teachers are required to produce a PP portfolio each academic year (UoB based and Partner Institutions). The 2014-2015 cohort is the first one being piloted to use an open source virtual platform (Moodle platform) to produce and present an ePPP (the electronic portfolio is completed online throughout the course as part of personal and professional Development). The pilot started in September and after only 12 weeks, we have already received very valuable feedback, which has encouraged us to share these initial experiences with the sector.

Background to PPP Portfolios

The revalidation of the TT curriculum provided a good opportunity to improve the traditional 'paper-rich' model common for many years in our TT programme.

The UoB has experience of using cloud-based technologies such as GoogleApps, EverNote, Edublogs, etc to support programmes such as Art, Media and Engineering, in addition to initial pilots using Mahara. Therefore the team decided to use our current VLE (Moodle) as the medium to produce and maintain the newly validated PPP module.

This decision was also prompted by a number of other variables such as: student module feedback; the academic group 'green' and efficiency agenda; the UoB eStrategy; recommendations from the FELTAG (2014) report; and the IT infrastructure.

It was also prompted by students transporting 'big' files; existing physical PP paper-based 'storage' capacity and the many 'excuses' students will provide when they are supposed to show the files to tutors at various stages during the academic year. Therefore it was decided to move from a 'paper rich' to 'paperless' portfolio which could be more easily stored and monitored online, aiming to create a more practical efficient and enriching system, inclusive for both tutors and trainees.

Creation of the 'ePPP'

The Government FELTAG report (2014) suggests that technology not only has the potential to engage more learners but also to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of educational providers.



A PPP Moodle template was set up to standardise the online portfolio presentation. This was created by cross university collaboration between the teacher education team and technology enhanced learning team, combining academic modular knowledge with practical ICT ability and digital creativity. The Moodle platform was designed to be reflective and collaborative as opposed to being a repository for course materials, incorporating interactive blogs, discussion forums, embedding 'portable' (cloud-based) eResources, online CVs, and webpages, among other possible eTools; in addition to requiring trainees to upload action plans, peer observations and lesson plan materials and observation reports.

Academic staff were encouraged to use, promote and engage trainees in using the Moodle platform and make it their 'own'. Some initial resistance from staff who were less keen to engage with electronic platforms and less familiar with digital technology was rapidly overcome by students' willingness to use technology. However, a few trainees regarded learning these new ICT skills as a steep learning curve, experiencing some technical issues. These challenges were overcome by delivering practical student and staff training sessions.

What's Next?

We hope that this first year pilot will offer rich feedback to organically enhance the electronic portfolio by learning from good and best practices. Alternative platforms such as Mahara portability will be explored. In 2015 the UoB will upgrade Moodle, allowing us to test new innovative features, applications and plug-ins. We aim to continue to disseminate good practices in teacher education, as the FELTAG (2014) report highlights 'A digital future is now expected by learners and employers' p. 5, so embracing technology is not a choice anymore!

References

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